

## Encuentro Catholics 'heartbroken' by scandals, but unshaken in faith

DALLAS (CNA) - While the so-called summer of scandals has hit the Church hard both in the United States and throughout the world, the faith of Catholics at the National V Encuentro in Grapevine remains largely unshaken.

"We're heartbroken from what we found out, because it doesn't move my faith," Rocio Portillo, an Encuentro participant from Las Vegas, told CNA. "It doesn't move my belief in my Church, and I'm really proud to be Catholic and to be brought up in that faith and to bring that to my children."

The National V Encuentro, held Sept. 20-23, is the culmination of a years-long process at the parish, diocesan and regional levels of listening to and empowering Hispanic and Latino Catholics.

The public disclosure of allegations of sexual misconduct against former cardinal Theodore McCarrick in June 2018 triggered a succession of public accusations that McCarrick had sexually assaulted or abused seminarians and priests over a period of decades, as well as a further accusation that he had sexually abused a minor.

Since then, numerous bishops in the United States and Rome have faced questions about when accusations against McCarrick had first been made known to Church authorities, and how he had been allowed to continue in ministry despite widespread rumors of his misconduct.

In the midst of this, a grand jury report detailing hundreds of cases of clerical sexual abuse in six diocese in Pennsylvania was published. While the scandals have not been the focus of the V Encuentro meeting, they have been mentioned numerous times in talks and among participants.

"My friends, we know that this is also a time of pain in our mother Church...as bishops, we have fallen short of what God expects of His shepherds," Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, President of the U.S. Bishop's Conference and head of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, said in his opening remarks at Encuentro on Sept. 20.

"For this, we again ask forgiveness from both the Lord and those who have been harmed, and from you, the People of God. May God grant us the wisdom and resolve to reform and renew His Church. We will continue to support survivors of abuse in their healing. We also commit to stronger protections to ensure the evil of sexual assault and abuse of all kinds is rooted from the Church," he said.

"Amidst this darkness, the Encuentro is a light that shines and illuminates the way forward. The enthusiasm, the passion, the love, and the joy of the Encuentro process is a means of grace, a gift to us as we rebuild the Church," he added.

Archbishop Gustavo García-Siller, MSpS, of San Antonio also addressed the scandals in his opening remarks on Thursday, telling participants that they "are right to be heartbroken by the faults of your shepherds," he said.

"In the reading of God's word that we have just heard, Saint Peter tells us that we 'share Christ's sufferings,'" he added. "Let us pray to God for the victims of the crimes that led to this

crisis. Do everything you can for the healing of all the victims of these abuses. And pray also for the perpetrators and for us, your shepherds.”

Father José Carlos, a priest from Hobbes, New Mexico, reiterated to CNA that Encuentro delegates have to be “a light in the darkness.”

Carlos Mendez, an Encuentro delegate from Los Angeles, told CNA that the scandals “would not reduce my faith at all, because I follow the Church, I don’t follow the deeds of other people.”

Alfredo Portillo, Encuentro delegate from Las Vegas, told CNA that while he is saddened by the news of scandals that seems to come “every day,” he was encouraged by what he saw at the Encuentro meeting.

“I think this came at a perfect moment,” he told CNA. “And from this something new is going to grow, and it’s much needed. This is just a great moment for the Church in the whole world.”